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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 003759

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ET](#) [ELEC](#) [UNREST](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS SPREAD, AT LEAST 33 DEAD

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Vicki Huddleston for reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Violent street clashes between anti-government demonstrators and squads of security forces spread beyond their initial flashpoints to most parts of the capital Nov. 2-3. Although confrontations occurred both in the vicinity of the Embassy and in Old Airport, where most embassy residences are located, there were no attacks against any USG facility. Some embassy vehicles surveying the city were stoned by rioters. We have unconfirmed reports of dozens of killings from both known contacts as well as the general public. The reputable Ethiopian Human Rights Council claims to have counted 33 bodies as of the evening of Nov.

¶12. Disturbances continued on November 3, punctuated by a reported confrontation between police and demonstrators as the former arrested CUD Vice President Bertukan Mideksa. With most of the senior CUD leadership now behind bars, it is not clear who -- if anyone -- is coordinating the street action. The sheer number of demonstrators and their wide dispersion throughout Addis Ababa appears to have overwhelmed the capacity of the security forces' riot control units and forced the GOE to deploy special forces units to try and cope with the situation. The Ambassadors' Donors Group ADG released a balanced statement Nov. 3 (septel) deplored the violence, calling for the release of political prisoners, demanding humane treatment for other detainees and a return to peaceful dialogue in order to strengthen Ethiopian democracy. After the restoration of civil order in Addis, achieving additional progress in suspended negotiations on key democratic reforms -- especially the National Electoral Board -- will be essential to preventing further outbreaks of violence and getting multi-party democracy back on track.

End Summary.

Riots Extend Throughout Addis

¶12. (C) Anti-government demonstrations that began on Nov. 1 in the central Mercato and Piazza areas of the capital spread to most areas of Addis Ababa Nov. 2. Several emboffs surveying the city witnessed numerous groups of demonstrators, many of whom were throwing rocks, blocking roads and generally challenging security forces. FM Seyoum told donor ambassadors that some demonstrators had used machetes against police, and that four grenades had been thrown at police. We heard numerous reports of clashes between demonstrators and police in Mercato, Piazza, Old Airport, and areas adjacent to the British and French Embassies. Shooting could be heard in close proximity to the Embassy compound in the Entoto area, as well as higher up on Entoto mountain itself. Pol/Econ Counselor encountered two groups of demonstrators who made angry gestures in the direction of his diplomatic vehicle. One rock hit his vehicle, and he was blocked from approaching the British Embassy, outside of which 10 demonstrators will reportedly killed earlier.

¶13. (C) Sporadic but heavy gunfire continued in Addis through the afternoon of November 3, including within earshot of the Embassy. Post has also heard reports unconfirmed reports of arrests in other areas of the country. USG contractors report that other major cities, including Dire Dawa, Bahir Dar and Awassa are calm, however.

Dozens More Dead, Over a Thousand Arrested

¶14. (C) We have unconfirmed reports of dozens of killings from both known contacts as well as the general public. The reputable Ethiopian Human Rights Council claims to have counted 33 bodies as of evening on Nov 2. News outlets have reported casualty figures ranging from a low of 8 to a high of 200. Some of the dead are reportedly high school students. At least 2 members of the security forces have been killed. Emboffs have seen a large number of police vehicles loaded with detainees in the vicinity of demonstrations, and international wire services report that many detainees are being held in an amphitheater in the center of the city. Post has also received calls indicating that security forces are conducting house-to-house round ups

in certain areas. FM Seyoum told Ambassadors Nov. 2 (septel) that there have been around 1,000 arrests, though he said the GOE was also releasing those who did not have a direct connection to the violence. There were also reports that the GOE elite gazi nits, staffed by trusted, highly-trained Tigrayan fighters, had been brought in to Addis.

Imprisoned CUDP Leaders Remain a Center of Controversy

15. (C) The GOE has rounded up nearly all senior CUDP leaders and some mid-level party officials -- 25 of 60 party council members, according to the PM. The attempted arrest of CUDP vice president Bertukan Mideksa on November 2 reportedly sparked a confrontation between a significant crowd and police seeking to take her away. It now appears that Bertukan eluded arrest at that time, but a student reported to Pol/Econ counselor that she surrendered to police around noon on November 3, allegedly because of continuing deaths and injuries among those who were seeking to protect her from security forces. Some of the violence on Nov. 2 occurred in the vicinity of the Federal Investigations facility in the Piazza area, where principal CUDP leaders, including president Hailu Shawel and Berhanu Nega, are being held. Reports yesterday indicated that Hailu and CUDP spokesman Gizachew Shiferaw were taken back home after their arrest to gather necessary medicines. Gizachew's son claims that policy escorting Gizachew planted documents concerning a conspiracy to assassinate senior GOE leaders in the CUDP leader's house, then tried to force him to sign a confession that the documents were his. Family members of Hailu and Berhanu on November 3 claimed that they had been turned away when trying to bring the prisoners diabetes medication; PM Meles and FM Seyoum assured the Charge Nov. 2 that prisoners would receive necessary medications as well as family visits, and be treated according to international standards. Neither United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) leaders nor CUD rebel Lidetu Ayalew were arrested. The PM indicated to the Charge that the GOE had arrested only those opposition leaders who advocated the overthrow of the government.

Who's to Blame? Plenty to Go Around

16. (C) The GOE charges that the CUDP coordinated and actively encouraged the public to confront the police in the streets. Foreign Minister Seyoum told the Ambassadors' Donors Group Nov. 2 that the CUDP had bused in supporters to instigate riots in the Mercato on Nov. 1; Prime Minister Meles told Charge Huddleston that the GOE had found a plan for street action prepared by Addis mayor-elect Berhanu Nega (Septel). Post was aware that this plan, which included honking horns and a stay-at-home strike, was widely distributed over the weekend in Addis. State media reported on November 3 that young demonstration ringleaders had received USD 150 each to stir up trouble. Post has no hard evidence at this point as to what role CUDP leaders played in funding or coordinating stone-throwing demonstrators. What is clear is that the demonstrations began two days after the CUDP's weekend call for a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience. At a minimum, the CUDP's civil disobedience helped create conditions for the violence to begin; GOE arrests first of protesters, then of CUDP leaders, provided the other ingredient necessary for combustion. With most of the senior CUD leadership behind bars, it's also not clear who -- if anyone -- is coordinating the street action. The GOE claims the demonstrations were planned in advance and has been carried out by the over 300,000 unemployed youth in the capital. All private newspapers, the only media to which the opposition had access apart from international radio broadcasts, are closed down for now. Several of their editors, some of them strong proponents of challenging the EPRDF in the streets, are now in custody.

- Comment I: More Than GOE Bargained For

17. (C) Large-scale street battles in Addis, where the EPRDF is weakest, is clearly the GOE worst nightmare and exactly what the Diaspora and hard-liners in the CUD wanted to see. Demonstrators -- and CUDP leader -- are clearly betting that the GOE will lose so much public and international support in battling protests that it will either be forced from power or have to cede some power to the opposition. The sheer number of demonstrators and their wide dispersion throughout Addis Ababa appears to have overwhelmed the capacity of the security forces' riot control units and forced the GOE to deploy special forces units to try and cope with the situation. Meles predicted to the Charge Nov. 2 that the GOE

will have fully restored order by Saturday Nov. 4. Disturbances on Nov. 3 -- a national holiday marking the end of Ramadan -- appeared to be less widespread and violent than those of Nov. 2.

Comment II: What Can We Do?

18. (C) Post has received a large number of calls begging us to do something to stop the violence. The demonstrations are clearly focused against the GOE, but there appears to be some level of popular frustration at that the U.S and UK have not been able to prevent this violence, as they had earlier. Some appear to believe the USG has sided with the GOE against CUD opposition leaders. Charge has continued to work closely with EU counterparts to urge the GOE to use restraint. The Ambassadors' Donors Group ADG released a balanced statement Nov. 3 (septel) deplored the violence, calling for the release of political prisoners, demanding humane treatment for other detainees and a return to peaceful dialogue in order to strengthen Ethiopian democracy. After the restoration of civil order in Addis, achieving additional progress in suspended negotiations on key democratic reforms -- especially the National Electoral Board -- will be essential to preventing further outbreaks of violence and getting multi-party democracy back on track.

HUDDLESTON